

Title: The Brotherhood of Nations at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers  
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Although the 1934 First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers is frequently abridged to a handful of speeches on socialist realism and the fate of Russian literature, it was a two-week performance that emphasized national literatures. Prominent reports on the status of Ukrainian, Belorussian, Tatar, Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Uzbek, Turkmen, and Tadzhik literatures presented official literary histories that justified literary status and nationhood. Blatantly Soviet for obvious reasons, these reports share generic elements. The underlying circular logic uses the nation's development to justify the importance of its literature, then uses that literature to justify national status. This logic varied, of course, according to historical circumstances. For example, the Georgian delegate Toroshelidze could cite Georgian literature's antiquity to prove its importance, while the Ukrainian delegate resorted to using Georgian literature as a parallel for Ukraine's much younger literature and the Belorussian report began with the republic's educational statistics. Reports also commonly featured an attack on bourgeois nationalist writers of that nationality (which could eclipse the attention to acceptable Soviet writers), reliance on Russian literature as the standard by which other literatures were measured, and calls for increased translation of national literatures. At the same time, these reports masked tensions between national self-definitions and Soviet narratives of nationality by presenting as resolved ongoing debates over "national" epics shared by multiple new nationalities, canons incorporating multiple languages and literary traditions shoehorned with great difficulty into Soviet teleology, and writers whose allegiance was more national than Soviet. Through generic repetition, these reports created a largely homogeneous performance of national heterogeneity which may prove to be as essential to defining Soviet literature as Socialist Realism.